



Feinstein, Bipartisan Group of Senators Seek Joint Judiciary-Intelligence Inquiry into Domestic Spying

December 20, 2005

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and a bipartisan group of Senate Intelligence Committee members today called for a joint inquiry by the Judiciary and Intelligence Committees into the President's authorization of domestic electronic surveillance of U.S. citizens.

"We write to express our profound concern about recent revelations that the United States Government may have engaged in domestic electronic surveillance without appropriate legal authority. These allegations, which the President, at least in part, confirmed this weekend require immediate inquiry and action by the Senate," the Senators wrote in a letter to Senators Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), chairman and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, and Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) and John D. Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.), the chairman and vice chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence.

Joining Senator Feinstein on the letter were Senators Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Ron Wyden (D-Ore.).

Senator Feinstein noted that under the Senate Intelligence Committee rules, "if five members of the Committee make a request in writing to the Chairman to call a meeting of the Committee, and the Chairman fails to call such a meeting within seven calendar days thereafter, including the day on which the written notice is submitted, these members may call a meeting by filing a written notice with the Clerk of the Committee who shall promptly notify each member of the Committee in writing of the date and time of the meeting."

The following is the text of the letter:

December 19, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Washington, DC 20510
The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Vice Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Washington, DC 2051

Dear Senators,

We write to express our profound concern about recent revelations that the United States Government may have engaged in domestic electronic surveillance without appropriate legal authority. These allegations, which the President, at least in part, confirmed this weekend require immediate inquiry and action by the Senate.

We respectfully request that the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Committee on the Judiciary, which share jurisdiction and oversight of this issue, jointly undertake an inquiry into the facts and law surrounding these allegations. The overlapping jurisdiction of these two Committees is particularly critical where civil liberties and the rule of law hang in the balance.

On Saturday the President stated that he “authorized the National Security Agency, consistent with U.S. law and the Constitution, to intercept the international communications of people with known links to al Qaeda and related terrorist organizations.” It is critical that Congress determine, as quickly as possible, exactly what collection activities were authorized, what were actually undertaken, how many names and numbers were involved over what period, and what was the asserted legal authority for such activities. In sum, we must determine the facts.

Both the Judiciary and the Intelligence Committee have had numerous hearings and briefings on the authorities provided to the nation’s law enforcement and intelligence agencies in their effort to defend against terrorism. We have extensively debated these issues. At no time, to our knowledge, did any Administration representative ask the Congress to consider amending existing law to permit electronic surveillance of suspected terrorists without a warrant such as outlined in the New York Times article.

We strongly believe that the Judiciary and Intelligence Committees should immediately seek to answer the factual and legal questions which surround these revelations, and recommend appropriate action to the Senate.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
Chuck Hagel
Ron Wyden

Carl Levin
Olympia Snowe

cc: Members of the Committee on the Judiciary
Members of the Select Committee on Intelligence